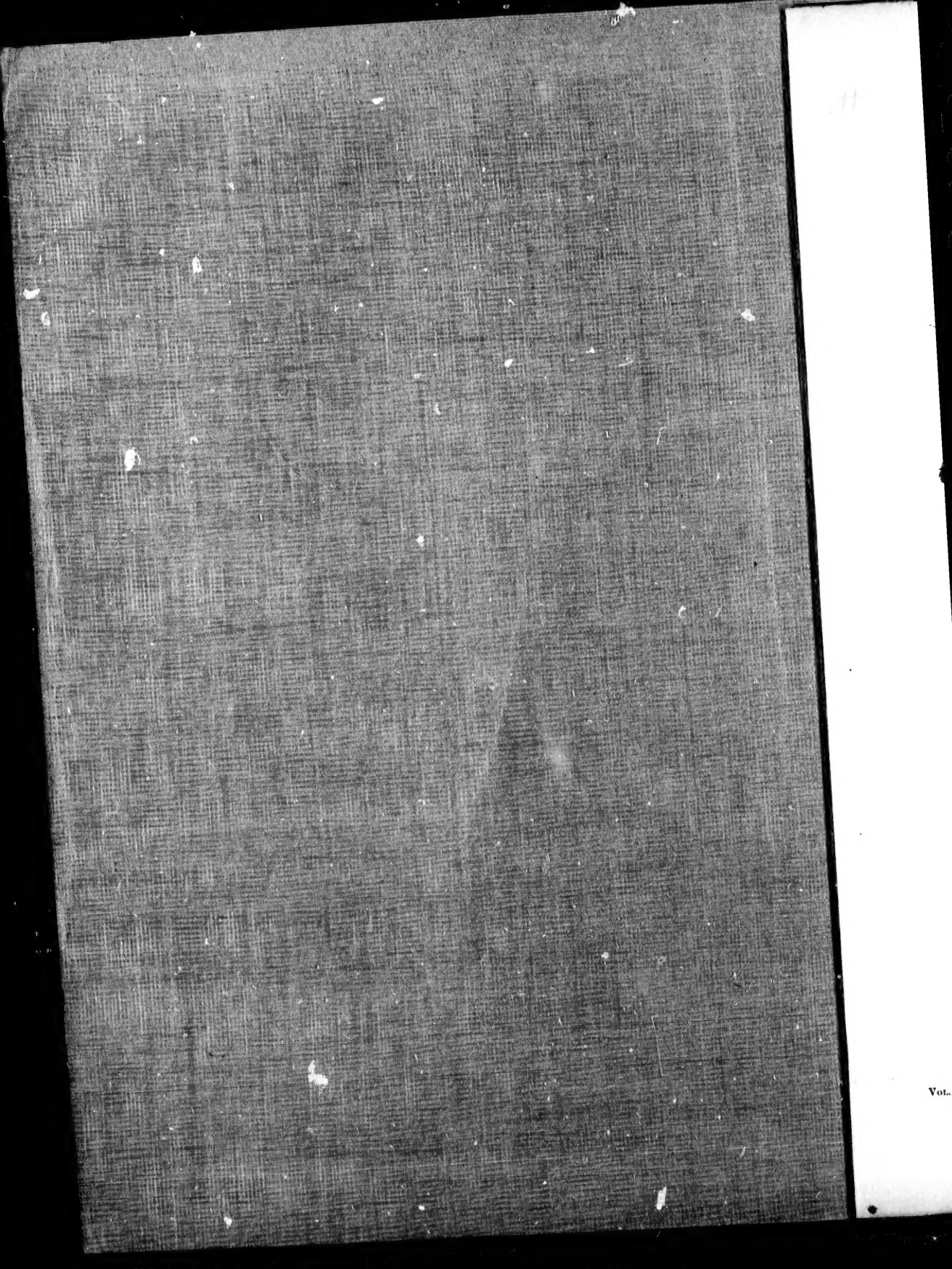






UPON A VIRGIN KISSING  
 A ROSE  
 'Twas but a single Rose,  
 Till You on It did Breathe  
 But since, Me thinks, it show  
 Not so much Rose as  
 Wreath R. Herrick.

MWP  
971H  
R661

## THE HONORABLE HUDSON BAY COMPANY.

IN the year 1670 a charter was granted by King Charles II. by which a company, calling themselves "The Company of Adventurers from England trading with Hudson's Bay," were constituted absolute proprietors of "all the lands and territories upon the countries, coasts, and confines of the seas, lakes, bays, rivers, creeks, and sounds, in whatsoever latitude they shall be, that lie between the entrance of the straits called Hudson's Straits." In return for all this the Company was to pay yearly to the sovereign two elks and two black beavers, but this only whenever the sovereign should happen to be within the territories granted.

Unfortunately for this exclusive privilege of trade, as early as 1640 French colonists pushed their way into the interior from Lake Superior, across the valley of the Red River, and up the great Saskatchewan River. They established their posts at every available point, and intercepted the Indians on their way to trade their furs with the agents of the Hudson Bay Company at their factories, which, for more than a century after the date of the charter, do not appear to have extended very far beyond the sea-coast. In the year 1783 a combination of these fur traders gave rise to the "Northwest Company of Montreal." This company is said to have employed about 5000 men altogether in its service at this time. With its organization hostilities broke out between the agents of the rival corporations. For more than forty years the conflict raged over a large part of North America. It was a golden era for the red man. Rival traders sought him out, coaxed and bribed him to have nothing to do with the shop across the way, assured him that Codlin, not Short, was his friend, paid him an extravagant price for his furs, and, better still, paid that price in rum.

So wretched at last did the general condition of the territory become that efforts were made to bring the traders to an amicable settlement and union of interests. Under conditions satisfactory to both parties, a coalition was formed in 1821, by which the Northwest Company ceased to exist, and henceforth the Hudson Bay Company ruled supreme from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. At the suggestion of the British government, Parlia-

ment conferred upon the new Company privileges of exclusive trade over a large tract of Indian country not included in their own chartered territories, tenable for a term of twenty years. In 1838 these privileges were again extended for a further term of twenty years, at the expiration of which the request for their renewal was denied. In 1869 the Company's rights to all the territory held under its charter were bought up, under imperial authority, by the Dominion of Canada, and the Company, as a monopoly and semi-sovereign power, ceased to exist. Not so its organization, however, or the influence and extent of its operations.

The supreme control of Hudson Bay affairs is vested, under the charter, in a Governor, Deputy-Governor, and committee of five directors, all annually chosen by the stockholders at a general meeting held each November. These functionaries, residing in London, delegate their authority to an official resident in their American possessions, called the Governor of Rupert Land, who acts as their representative. The authority of the Governor is supreme, except during the session of his Council, which is held once a year, and continues its formal sittings for two or three days.

The other parties to the Council are the members of the "Fur Trade," which constitutes, in its relations to the Hudson Bay Company, the wheel within the wheel. From this the profits of the Company may be said to be entirely derived. It constitutes the means by which the Company avails itself of the right to trade, which it possesses in its territories. The members of the Fur Trade reside entirely in the localities where the business is carried on in North America, and are employed in carrying out its actual workings. They are composed of the two highest grades of commissioned officers, called Chief Factors and Chief Traders. These furnish none of the capital stock, and receive their commissions merely as the rewards of long service, seldom of shorter date than fourteen years, as clerks. No annual election of officials forming any thing like the Company's London Board takes place among the partners of the Fur Trade. The only approximation to a common action which exists is af-



THE RIVAL COMPANIES SOLICITING TRADE A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

forded by the annual meetings of the Council before referred to, which all Chief Factors and Chief Traders are entitled to attend. Again, the Board in London have a special representative in Rupert Land in the person of the Governor. He is president of the councils of officers held in the country, and there is no instance of his having been outvoted or his action set aside by any such body. On the other hand, the Fur Trade has no representative at the house in London. An annual dispatch is addressed by the London Board to the Council of the Northern Department. This constitutes the sole occasion on which the Company as a body approaches the Fur Trade as a body in the whole course of their business.

The partners of the Fur Trade are connected with the Company under such provisions that their incomes fluctuate with the alterations of the annual profits of the trade. A definite number of shares com-

poses their aggregate interest. Of these, a Chief Trader possesses one, and a Chief Factor two. Vacancies in their ranks are immediately filled up as they occur from the death or retirement of the members, the qualification necessary to obtain the commission being a majority of all the votes of all the Chief Factors. The candidates for a factorship are necessarily Traders, while those for a vacant tradership are from the ranks of salaried clerks, seldom of less than fourteen years' standing in the service.

Although the Hudson Bay Company is itself an entirely English corporation, its officers in the fur country are nearly all Scotsmen or natives of the Orkney Islands. Applicants are enlisted at an early age—from sixteen to eighteen—for a nominal term of five years, though the more distinct understanding is that the applicant shall devote his life to the business. At certain periods a requisition is forward-

ed from the fur country for additional help, and the successful candidate is sent by return packet to York Factory, on Hudson Bay. His salary begins upon the date of his departure from London, the sum paid during the first five years of apprenticeship ranging from £20 to £50 sterling, together with rations, quarters, and clothing from the Company's shop at cost and ten per centum. From York Factory he is generally sent to pass his apprenticeship in the extreme northern districts, where, after a term of service ranging from fourteen years and upward, during which his



ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDE ELECT.

salary has increased from £20 to £100 sterling, and he has passed by a series of transfers from the remote and unimportant post whence he started to the position of accountant in one of the great dépôt forts, he slips from the ranks of salaried men into the partnership of the Fur Trade as Chief Trader, and is placed in charge of

some important post. He has passed in the line of promotion a class of clerks known as "post-masters." These are usually promoted laborers, who for good behavior or faithful service have been partly put on a footing with the gentlemen of the service, but who lack the necessary education to successfully compete with the Scotch importations. Below these still are the interpreters, who for the most part are more than ordinarily intelligent laborers of pretty long standing in the service, and who, having obtained some knowledge of the Indian tongues, are found useful in trading with the natives. Of a still lower grade are the laborers, voyageurs, and hunters.

Death or retirement next opens the way for the Trader's advancement to the rank of Chief Factor, the highest office under the Governor, to which any one can rise in the service. In the exercise of the functions of this office he assumes control of a district often as large as a European kingdom, with head-quarters at the largest post within its limits, and a general supervision of all the other posts.

The great majority of the Company's officers marry natives of the country, having first to obtain the consent of the Governor, as rations, quarters, etc., are furnished the family equally with themselves. But it occasionally occurs that some gentleman of independent taste turns up who prefers a wife from the old country. For such emergencies provision is made in the paternal character of the Company. The fastidious lover sends an order to the house in London, with the special characteristics he desires in a life partner. The Company selects such a one as it may deem suitable from the list of candidates always ready, and forwards her, duly invoiced. Upon her arrival she is married out of hand. Many of the servants of the Company whose lives have been passed in the service retire to end their days at Fort Garry, in the new province of Manitoba, forming among themselves a society constituting the aristocracy of the wilderness.

The enormous extent of the territory over which the Hudson Bay Company carries on its trade, and throughout which dépôts and posts are established, can scarcely be comprehended at a merely cursory glance. From Pembina, on the Red River, to Fort Anderson, on the Mackenzie, is as great a distance as from London to Mecca; the space between the Company's





HALF-BREED FAMILY ON THE WAY TO A TRADING POST.

post at Sault Ste. Marie and Fort Simpson, on the Pacific, measures more than 2500 geographical miles; from the King's Posts to the Pelly Banks is farther than from Paris to Samarcand. The area of country under its immediate influence is about 4,500,000 square miles, or more than one-third greater than the whole extent of Europe.

For purposes of trade the original chartered territories of the Company, and the vast outlying circuit of commercial relations, are divided into sections called the Northern, Southern, Montreal, and Western departments. Of these, the Northern Department is situated between Hudson Bay and the Rocky Mountains; the Southern between James Bay and Canada, including also East Main, on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay; the Montreal Department comprehends the extent of the business in the Canadas; while the West-

ern comprises the regions west of the Rocky Mountains. These four departments are again divided into fifty-three smaller portions, called districts, each of which is under the direction of a superintending officer, and has a *dépôt* fort, to which all the supplies for the district are forwarded, and to which all furs and other produce are sent for shipment to England. These districts are again subdivided into numerous minor establishments, forts, posts, and outposts. Over each of these there is an officer and from two to forty men, mechanics, laborers, and servants. Besides, the Company employs multitudes of men as voyageurs, manning and working the boats and canoes in every part of the territory. The discipline and etiquette maintained are of the strictest kind, and an *esprit du corps* exists between the three thousand officers—commissioned and non-commissioned—voyageurs, and servants such as is only

to be found in the army, or in an ancient and honorable service.

The forts and trading posts of the Company are scattered over its immense territories at distances apart varying from fifty to three hundred miles. A better idea may, perhaps, be obtained of their relative positions, and of the isolated lives of their garrisons, by imagining the broad State of Ohio planted in the middle of the fur country. In that event the Company would build one trading post in it.

The term fort, as applied to the establishments of the Company, and suggesting a formidable array of rampart, bastion, loop-holed wall, and fortalice, is a misnomer, there being only two or three in the whole fur country at all worthy of the name. Upper and Lower Forts Garry are veritable forts, surrounded by stone walls, with bastions at each of the four corners.

The trading and interior dépôt posts of the Company are strange, quaint-looking places, built according to a general type. They stand generally upon the second or lower bank of some navigable river or lake, so as to be easily accessible to the boats which annually visit them with supplies. A trading post is invariably a square, inclosed by immense trees or pickets, one end sunk deeply in the ground, and placed close together. A platform, about the height of an ordinary man, is carried along the inner side of the square, so as to enable any one to peep over without danger from arrow or bullet. At the four corners are bastions, octagonal in shape, pierced with embrasures, to lead the Indians to believe in the existence of cannon, and intended to strike terror to any red-skinned rebel bold enough to dispute the supremacy of the Company. The entrance to the stockade is closed by two massive gates, an inner and an outer one. In the centre of the square stands the residence of the factor or trader in charge, and of the upper class of employés, while about its four sides, close to the stockade, are ranged the trading store, the fur-room, the warehouses, servants' quarters, etc. Beside the larger dwelling rises a tall flag-staff, bearing the flag of the Company, with its strange device, "*Pro pelle cutem*"—skin for skin—and near by a bell tower, the tones from which mark the hours of labor and rest. In front of the gate lounge a few half-breeds or Indians in tasselled cap and dirty white capote, or tattered blankets. A band of horses graze in a distant meadow, while nearer by a few leather *tepees*, or bark lodges, from the frilled poles of which the smoke curls lazily, indicate the home of the aboriginal hanger-on. At one side of the palisade a few rude crosses or wooden railings, stained by rain and snow-drift, and blown over by the tempest, mark the last resting-places of the dead.

The trade-rooms at all the posts are arranged with strict reference to the wants of the peculiar custom which they attract. From the heavy joists of the low ceiling depend twine, steel-traps, tin kettles, frying-pans, etc.; on various shelves are piled bales of cloth of all colors, capotes, blankets, and caps; and in smaller divisions are placed files, scalping-knives, gun screws, flints, balls of twine, fire steels, canoe awls, and glass beads of all colors and sizes. Drawers in the counter contain

needles, pins, scissors, fish-hooks, thimbles, and vermilion for painting canoes and faces. On the floor is strewn a variety of copper kettles, from half a pint to a gallon; and in one corner of the room stand a dozen trading-guns, and beside them a keg of powder and a bag of shot.

In some of the trade-rooms a small space is railed off by the counter near the door, behind which the Indians stand to trade. Sometimes they are confined to a separate apartment, called the Indian-room, adjoining that occupied by the traders, and business is carried on through a loop-hole communicating between the two. In many of the posts in the plain country the trade-room is cleverly contrived so as to prevent a sudden rush of the Indians, the approach from outside the pickets being through a long narrow passage, only of sufficient width to admit of one Indian at a time, and bent at an acute angle near the window at which the trader stands. This precaution is rendered necessary by the frantic desire which sometimes seizes upon the Indian to shoot the clerk, which he might easily do were the passage straight.

At most of the interior posts time moves slowly, and change is almost unknown. To-day is the same as a hundred years ago. The list of goods ordered from England for this year has exactly the same items as that of 1779. Strands, cottons, beads, and trading-guns are still the wants of the Indians, and are still traded for musquash and beaver.

The system of trade at the Company's posts is entirely one of barter. Until recent years money values were unknown; but this medium of exchange has gradually become familiar to the Indians, and the almighty dollar is rapidly asserting its supremacy in savagedom.

The standard of values throughout the fur country is still, however, the skin of the beaver, by which the price of all furs and articles of trade is regulated. To explain: suppose that four beavers are equivalent in value to a silver-fox skin, two martens to a beaver, twenty musk-rats to a marten, and so on. The Crow's Claw or the Man-with-Feathers wishes to purchase a blanket or a gun from the Company; he would have to give, say, three silver-foxes, or twenty beaver skins, or 200 musk-rats, or other furs, according to their relative position of worth in the tariff. Has he a horse valued at sixty skins, he would trade

it thus: a gun, fifteen skins; a capote, ten skins; a blanket, ten skins; ball and powder, ten skins; tobacco, fifteen skins—total, sixty skins. So any service rendered or labor performed by the Indians is paid for in skins, the beaver being the unit of computation.

For a very evident reason the price paid for furs is not fixed in strict accordance

mild and equitable sway; in the latter, independent Indians, roaming the plains in great bands, are too strong to be controlled by the handfuls of men at the forts. For this reason the trading posts in the plain country are defended by stout and lofty stockades, and every precaution taken to guard against a surprise during the progress of a trade, for the wily Blackfeet and



TRADE-ROOM, HUDSON BAY COMPANY'S FORT, IN THE PLAIN COUNTRY.

with their intrinsic value. If it were so, all the valuable fur-bearing animals would soon become extinct, as no Indian would bother himself to trap a cheap fur while a high-priced one remained uncaught.

The manner in which trade is conducted by the Company differs radically in the Northern and Southern districts, owing to the different habits and dispositions of the Indians, those of the former being solitary hunters and trappers on foot, and those of the latter a race of gregarious horsemen. From the Northern or wood Indians comes the greater part of the trade in fine furs, while the line of forts along the Saskatchewan and in the plain country furnishes the coarser furs, buffalo-ropes, leather, pemmican, and other provisions. In the former country the Company is all-powerful, and rules its subjects with a

Crees embrace every opportunity of taking possession of a trading post, and helping themselves to its contents. Bars, bolts, and places to fire down upon the Indians abound in every direction.

The scenes presented during the progress of a plain Indian trade are very picturesque and exciting. A week or more previous to the trade there appear at the fort two or three Indians, who announce themselves as the advance agents of their band, and authorized to negotiate with the officer in charge for the trade of their peltries, robes, and provisions. They are shown into the Indian-room, where they are handsomely entertained, and made the recipients of presents according to their rank and the anticipated value of the trade.

On the day appointed for the trade there





THE PALAVER—A DEAR PONY.

appears moving over the plain a motley crowd of Indians, squaws, dogs, and tra-vaillies. Ascertaining that none of their enemies are in sight, they at once pitch their camp at a little distance from the fort, a few of the braves riding up to learn whether the post is in readiness for the trade.

Upon their first appearance every thing has been made ready for their reception. Guns have been loaded and placed at the loop-holes commanding the Indian and trade rooms; all the gates of the stout log stockade have been securely fastened. From the shelves of the trade-room a greater part of the goods have been taken, leaving only a few blankets, strands, guns, and a little tea and sugar. This is necessitated by the fact that the untutored Indian, unaccustomed to the sight of so much finery, is apt to behave much in the manner of a hungry boy placed behind the counter of a pastry-cook's shop, to the

utter collapse of all profit upon the trade to the Hudson Bay Company. All communication between the Indian and trade rooms and other parts of the building is closed, and there remains for the use of the customers only the narrow passage leading from the outer gate of the stockade to the Indian-room, the Indian-room itself, and the narrow hallway between it and the trade-room. This latter is furnished with two heavy doors, and the space between them will hold from two to four Indians. In trading, but two persons are admitted into the trade-room at a time, in the following manner:

The passage door communicating with the Indian-room is opened, and two Indians admitted therein; then it is closed, and the door leading into the trade-room opened. When the two braves have finished trading, they are returned by a similar process, one door always being kept shut. Both these doors are made to slide

into their places, and are manipulated from the apartment occupied by the traders.

The trade-room is divided by a stout partition, reaching from floor to ceiling, into two parts, one for the traders and goods, the other for the Indians. In the centre of this partition an aperture about a yard square is cut, divided by a grating

As soon as the advance guard of Indians approach, the trader accompanies them to camp, where a general palaver begins. Many speeches are made on both sides, the Indians promising to conduct the trade in the most peaceable and orderly manner, the whole affair terminating by the chief loading a pony with a general assortment of robes, pemmican, dressed skins, etc..



A TRAPPER GOING HIS ROUNDS.

into squares sufficiently large to admit the passage of a blanket or robe, but inadequate to the admission of the red man in person. This is necessitated by the Indian's forgetfulness of the existence of counters, and the exasperating pertinacity with which he insists upon a personal examination of the goods. It sometimes happens, too, that he expresses his dissatisfaction at the price of a much-coveted article by desultory firing at the person of the trader, who, in the absence of such partition, has no means of escape or concealment.

and handing horse and all he carries over to the trader. This is the usual Indian method of beginning a trade, and has only one drawback—the trader is expected to return a present of twice the value. And it is certain that if in the trade which ensues the trader buys a hundred horses, not one will cost him half so dear as that which demonstrates the large-heartedness of the chief. After the trader has, in turn, shown the bigness of his heart by an ample present of blankets and finery, the braves and squaws move up to the fort with their provisions and peltries, the trade having

now fairly begun. The chief exhorts his braves to conduct themselves peaceably, and not make him the possessor of a forked tongue by bad conduct. Then the outer gate is thrown open, and the eager throng rushes in, every man in the post being at his place and ready for any thing that may turn up.

The Indian-room being now filled with the excited crowd, two braves with their peltries are admitted to the trade-room. They look through the grating, point to the articles they want, and pay for them in installments. If an Indian were to bring a hundred skins of different sorts, or all alike, he would trade off every skin

nounces through a loop-hole that there will be enough for all. Thus the trade progresses, until all the furs and provisions have changed hands, and there remains nothing more to be traded.\*

The method of trading for horses depends much upon the humor the Indians are in upon completion of the exchange of goods and peltries. If well satisfied, then the horse-trading takes place immediately outside the stockade, the animals being led within as fast as purchased; for the Indian's fine sense of humor frequently leads him to ride away a horse he has just sold, by way of practical joke upon the owner. If an aggressive spirit ob-



TRAPPERS LEAVING THEIR HUNTING GROUNDS.

separately, and insist on payment for each skin as he sold it. In this way he seems to get more for his money.

The trade progresses briskly, the purchasers being returned to the Indian-room as soon as supplied, and a new batch let in. In the Indian-room there is terrible excitement. As each couple appears with their purchases they are eagerly questioned as to what they saw, whether there is any of this or that article, and whether the supply is likely to be exhausted before the questioner's turn arrives. Each succeeding statement that there are on the shelves but a few guns, blankets, cloths, etc., intensifies the anxiety, and the crush to get in increases tenfold, until the trader an-

tain, however, a single brave with his pony or ponies is admitted at a time within the stockade, the trade effected, and the owner paid and passed out before the admission of a second.

As before stated, the method of trading in the Northern districts differs from that pursued upon the plain. It is the custom of the Company to issue to the trapping or wood Indians such goods as they need when the summer supplies arrive at the trading posts, such advances to be paid for at the close of the hunting season.

\* The establishment of mounted police stations throughout a considerable portion of the plain country of late years has tended in some measure to modify this method of trade at some of the posts.



THE BALANCE OF TRADE.

In this way a great majority of the Indian and half-breed hunters and trappers really live in a state of peonage to the Company. Like the Mexican or Brazilian peon, they are so constantly and, for them, largely in debt to the Fur Trade as to be practically its servants. By this system of advances the Company rules its vast territories, and may be said to feed, clothe, and wholly maintain nine-tenths of the entire population. The continuance of the system is caused by the necessities of the hunters and trappers, many of whom it preserves from absolute starvation.

About the first of November, when the animals have got their winter coats, and fur is "in season," the Indian trapper lays out his trapping walk for the winter, along which he places a line of traps from ten to fifteen miles in length. Once or twice a week he makes the round of this walk, and gathers such furs as may be caught. Most of the finer furs are taken by means of the wooden dead-fall and steel-traps of various sizes, the larger

fur-bearing animals being either shot, caught in snares, or killed by the poisoned bait.

Toward the latter end of March the Indian trappers leave their hunting grounds, and make a journey to the forts with the produce of their winter's toil. Here they come, moving through the forest, a motley throng. The braves march in front, too proud and lazy to carry any thing but their guns, and not always doing even that. After them come the squaws, bending under loads, driving dogs, or hauling hand-sleds laden with meat, furs, tanned deer-skins, and infants. The puppy dog and inevitable baby never fail in Indian lodge or procession. The cheerful spectacle of the two packed together upon the back of a woman is not of infrequent occurrence. Day after day the mongrel party journeys on, until the fort is reached. Then comes the trade. The trader separates

the furs into lots, placing the standard valuation upon each. Then he adds the amounts together, and informs the trapper that he has got sixty or seventy "skins." At the same time he hands his customer sixty or seventy little bits of wood, so that the latter may know, by re-



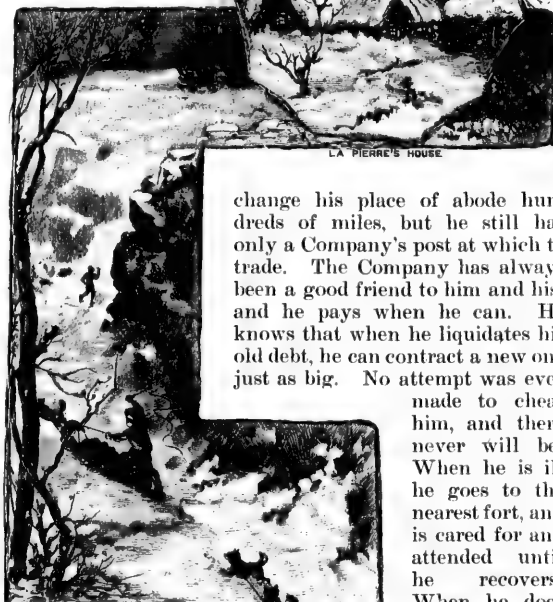
CARE FOR A SICK INDIAN.

turning these in payment for the goods for which he really barter his furs, just how fast his funds decrease. The first act of the Indian is to cancel the debt contracted for advances at the beginning of the season; then he looks round upon the bales of cloth, blankets, etc., and after a long while concludes to have a small white capote for his toddling boy. The price is told him, and he hands back ten of his little pieces of wood, then looks about him for something else. Every thing is carefully examined, and with each purchase there is a contest over the apparent inequality between the amount received and that given. In the Indian's opinion one skin should pay for one article of merchandise, no matter what the value of the latter may be. And he insists, too, upon selecting the skin. The steelyard and weighing balance are his especial objects of dislike. He does not know what medicine that is. That his tea and sugar should be balanced against a bit of iron, conveys no idea of the relative values of peltries and merchandise to him. He insists upon making the balance swing even between the trader's goods and his own furs, until a new light is thrown upon the question of steelyards and scales by the acceptance of his proposition. Then, when he finds his fine furs balanced against heavy blankets, he concludes to abide by the old method of letting the white trader decide the weight in his own way; for it is clear that the steelyard is a very great medicine, which no brave can understand.

When the trapper has spent all his little pieces of wood, and asks for further advances, he is allowed to draw any reasonable amount; for, contrary to the rule in civilized life, a debt is seldom lost save by the death of the Indian. He may



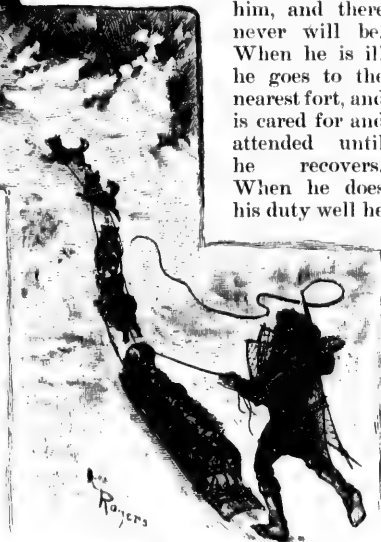
OLD FORT YUKON.



LA PIERRE'S HOUSE.

change his place of abode hundreds of miles, but he still has only a Company's post at which to trade. The Company has always been a good friend to him and his, and he pays when he can. He knows that when he liquidates his old debt, he can contract a new one just as big. No attempt was ever

made to cheat him, and there never will be. When he is ill he goes to the nearest fort, and is cared for and attended until he recovers. When he does his duty well he



THE GREAT NORTHERN POCKET.

gets a present, and he never performs any labor without receiving fair compensation. Such humane treatment strongly binds the Indian and half-breed to the Company.



Communication is maintained between every post in the vast territory and headquarters during the long months of winter by means of the Great Northern Packet, which leaves Fort Garry annually about the 10th December. The appliances for the carriage of this important mail are snow-shoes and dog sledges. The latter are two in number, drawn by four dogs each. Upon each of these sledges there are bound a pair of stoutly constructed boxes, measuring about three feet in length by eighteen inches deep and fourteen wide. These wooden mail-bags, when properly packed, contain an astonishing amount of written and printed matter. The dogs run at a regular trot, the drivers accompanying them on foot at the rate of about forty miles per day. The frozen channels of the rivers and lakes form the general roadway, and Lake Winnipeg is traversed to Fort Carlton, near the eastern end of the Saskatchewan Valley, the chief centre of the winter packet arrangements. Here the entire mail is overhauled and repacked, branch packets being sent off east and west, while the Great Northern Packet journeys on to the remote arctic regions to which it is consigned. From the morning when the packet left the office at Fort Garry to the evening when the solitary dog train, last of many, drags the same packet, now reduced to a tiny bundle, into the inclosure of La Pierre's house, more than a hundred nights have been passed in the great northern forests; over three thousand miles have been traversed; a score of different dog trains have hauled it, sending off at long intervals branch dog packets to the right and left. It was midwinter when it started; it arrives just as the sunshine of mid-May is beginning to carry a faint whisper of coming spring to the valleys of the Upper Yukon.

In former days all excess in the amount of mail matter transmitted through the winter packets was so jealously guarded against that the carriage of newspapers was disallowed, with the single exception of an annual file of the *Montreal Gazette*, forwarded for general perusal. The fifty-two copies of that periodical circulated over that vast country from post to post, until, worn out by much service, they finished their course in a lonely station in latitude  $67^{\circ} 30'$  north. At this date, however, newspapers form the bulk of the Company's inward-bound packet.

In the month of April the whole force at each of the Company's posts begin to pack the furs accumulated during the winter into bales of from eighty to one hundred pounds weight. The outer covering is generally of buffalo or other large skins. If it be an inland post, loops are made to each package in order to sling it upon a pack-saddle; if upon a navigable stream, boats are used instead of horses. This is called fitting out a brigade, and constitutes the grand annual event in the traders' and employés' lives. Their destination is the dépôt fort of the district, there to meet the boat brigades bringing the yearly supplies. When the dépôt is reached, the furs are



NEWG OF THE DAY.

debarked, and the various goods to supply the trade until a similar exchange next year are handed over to the trader, who generally goes in charge of the brigade. These trips occupy from two to four months. The meeting of these brigades at the dépôt presents a quaint and singular spectacle. The wild look, long, unkempt hair, sunburned faces, and leather costumes of the traders are only exceeded by the still wilder appearance and absence of almost any clothing among their Indian attendants. The scene while the brigades remain is one continuous orgy.

When the brigades depart for their several destinations, the furs are forwarded by boat to the great dépôt forts on the

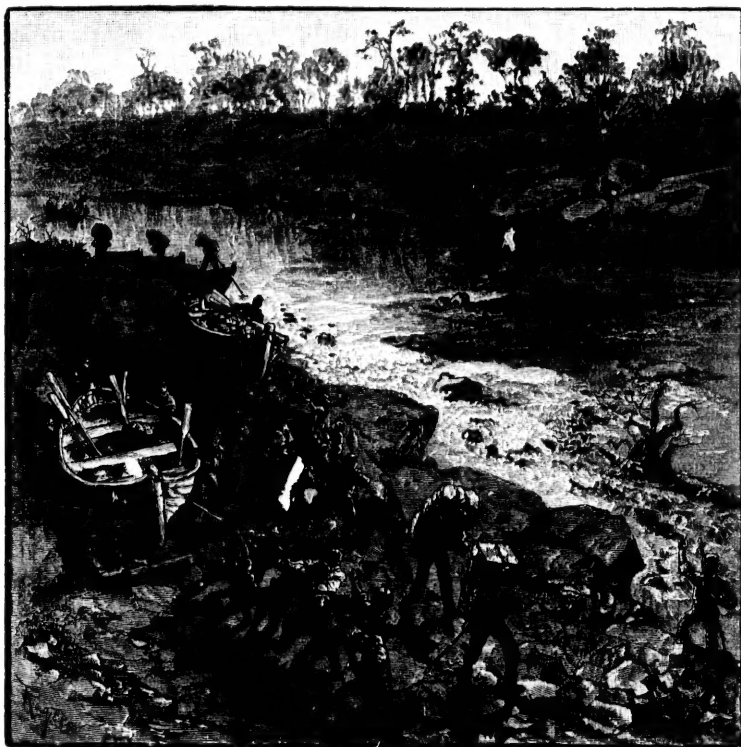
sea-coast, where they are all sorted and repacked, being pressed into bales by enormous levers, and rum and tobacco are placed between the layers of skins to keep out the insects and larvæ of moths. They are then loaded on the Company's ships, which annually bring out the stores from England, and are eventually sold at public auction. The sales in London alone amount to more than \$1,000,000 per annum, and this forms but a small part of the yearly returns from the Company's territories, large quantities being exported to the Continent, to the

United States, and to the Canadas; and occasionally furs are exported by the Company to China.

The annual supply of its vast chain of trading posts with merchandise is a matter of vital importance to the Company.



MEETING OF BOATS AND INLAND TRAINS.



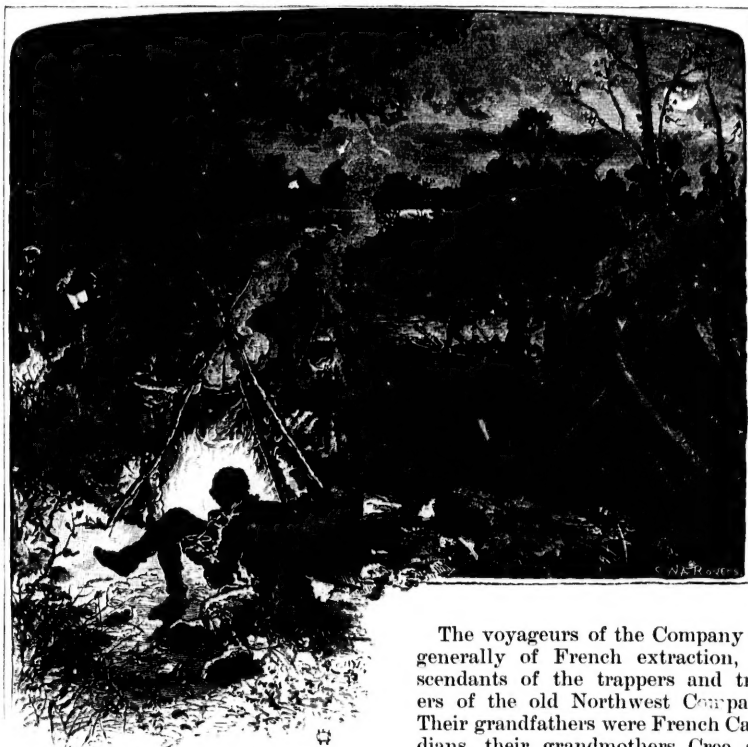
MAKING A PORTAGE.

and is conducted with a care and system devoted to no other branch of its trade. Early in June of each year the Company's ships leave the Thames for the fur country. It is the end of August when they land at York Factory, on Hudson Bay. For one year the goods they have brought lie in the warehouses of the factory; twelve months later they reach Norway House; twelve months later, again, they reach Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie. The furs for which they are exchanged reach London by similar stages in three years more; so that six years elapse from the date of the departure of the rough flint-gun to the return of the skin of sable for which it has been bartered.

The supplies brought out by the ships are distributed to the interior posts by means of what are called "inland boats." Shaped like an ordinary whale-boat, they carry a burden of three and a half tons, and require nine men as crew. A num-

ber of these boats constitute a brigade, each of which is placed in charge of a guide. These brigades, leaving Fort Garry in June, tend north and northwest toward Methy Portage and York Factory, there to meet other brigades from the remote arctic districts, to whom they deliver their cargoes, receiving in return the furs brought down from the interior posts. When this exchange is effected, each brigade retraces its course.

On many of the streams traversed by these brigades navigation is seriously interrupted by rapids, water-falls, and cataracts, to surmount which the boats with their cargoes have to be landed and carried round the obstruction, to be relaunched at the nearest practicable point. Again, it occurs that a height of land is reached, across which the boats and cargoes must be dragged in order to descend the opposite stream. In either event the operation is known as "making a portage."



VOYAGEURS' CAMP.

The standard weight of each package used in the fur trade is one hundred pounds, each boat containing seventy-five "inland pieces," as such packages are called. In crossing a portage each voyageur is supposed equal to the task of carrying two inland pieces upon his back. A broad leather strap, called a "portage strap," is placed round the forehead, the ends of which strap, passing back over the shoulders, support the pieces, which, thus carried, lie along the spine from the small of the back to the crown of the head. The departure of these boat brigades on their long trips forms a very picturesque spectacle. The boats are decked in holiday attire: small red flags, streaming ensigns, gaudy ribbons, and the spreading antlers of moose and elk appear every where above the square packages of freight. Congregated upon the beach are the wives and sweethearts of the boatmen, who have come to bid them adieu.

The voyageurs of the Company are generally of French extraction, descendants of the trappers and traders of the old Northwest Company. Their grandfathers were French Canadians, their grandmothers Cree and Chippewa squaws. A merry, light-hearted race, they are recklessly generous, hospitable, and extravagant. In the summer they pull an oar in the boat brigades; in the winter they vary seasons of hunting with longer intervals of total idleness. Vanity is their besetting sin, and they will leave themselves and their families without the common necessities of life to become the envied possessors of a handsome suit, a gun, or a train of dogs, which may happen to attract their fancy. Intensely superstitious, and firm believers in dreams, omens, and warnings, they are apt disciples of the Romish faith. Completely under the influence of the priests in most respects, and observing the outward forms of religion with great regularity, they are yet grossly immoral, often dishonest, and generally untrustworthy. But as hunters, guides, and voyageurs they are unequalled. Of more powerful build, as a rule, than the pure Indian, they are his equal in endurance and readiness of resource.

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